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The National Women's Health Information Center

A project of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health



## How to Get a Second Opinion

Even though their training can be similar, health care providers (HCPs) have their own opinions, experiences, and thoughts on how to practice, including diagnosing and treating conditions or diseases. Some HCPs opt to take a more conservative, or traditional, approach, while other HCPs are more aggressive and tend to use the newest tests and therapies. Since health care (including mental health) is a highly specialized and constantly changing field, it can be difficult for every HCP to be skilled in the latest technology. Getting a second opinion from a different HCP might give you a fresh perspective and more information on how to treat your condition. You can then weigh your options and make a more informed choice about what to do. If you are given similar opinions from two HCPs, you also can talk with a third HCP. Here are some tips for how to get a second opinion:

- **Ask your HCP to recommend another HCP or specialist for another opinion.** Don't worry about hurting your HCP's feelings. Most HCPs welcome a second opinion, especially when surgery or long-term treatment is involved.
- **If you don't feel comfortable asking your HCP about whom to go to for a second opinion, contact another HCP you trust.** You can also call university teaching hospitals and medical societies in your area for names of HCPs. Some of this information is available on the Internet.
- **Always check with your health insurance provider first to make sure they will cover the cost of a second opinion. Many health insurance providers do.** Ask if there are any special procedures you or your primary care doctor need to follow.
- **Arrange to have your medical records sent to the second opinion HCP before your visit.** This gives the new HCP time to look at your records and can help you to avoid repeating medical tests. You need to give written permission to your current HCP to forward any records or test results. You can also request a copy of your medical record for your own files.
- **Learn as much as you can about your condition.** Ask your HCP for information you can read, go to a local library, or do a search on the Internet. Some teaching hospitals and universities have medical libraries that are open to the public. But, be aware that sorting through information that is complicated and sometimes contradictory can be a daunting task. List your questions and concerns and bring the list to discuss with the HCP you are seeing for a second opinion.
- **Never rely solely on the telephone or Internet for a second opinion.** When you get a second opinion, you need to be seen by an HCP. A sound second opinion includes a physical examination and a thorough review of your medical records. Don't forget to ask the HCP to send a written report to your primary HCP and get a copy for your records.